

art and artists

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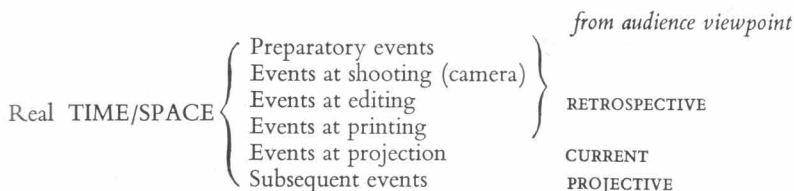
artists' films

real time/space

Malcolm Le Grice

From my own film work since 1966, I have gradually been developing ideas which lead me more and more to the consideration of the film in relationship to the conception of 'Real' TIME/SPACE. The term 'real-time' has grown in use from the field of computers, but has much wider implications and significance than the way in which it is used there. In computer terms, an operation in 'real-time' is one which is going on as results are calculated and output, rather than one where results are stored 'off-line' for future consultation. 'Real-time' is *now*. Real TIME/SPACE is *now and here*.

Though this seems simple, it is far from obvious how such a general notion can be applied to film. First of all the whole history of the commercial cinema has been dominated by the aim of creating convincing illusory time/space, and eliminating all traces of the actual physical state of affairs at any stage of the film, from scripting, through shooting, editing, printing, promotion to projection. However, largely through developments in the Underground Film, it is possible to see an increasing concern with the problem of 'actuality', 'reality' at the various stages of film production and presentation. I would like to introduce a diagrammatic scheme for applying the notion of Real TIME/SPACE to the processes or events of film.



In the third column, I have carefully included the way in which the various aspects of 'reality' in the film relate to the audience or more precisely the individual viewer. His point of access is through the projection event only, and that for him is the current confrontation. Certainly this factor has been a prime consideration for

me, and I have given a great deal of thought to the kind of condition, role and behaviour which is available to the audience, to the 'credibility' of what is presented as some form of, or relation to 'reality'. I have considered the situation of the audience politically and ethically, and have reacted strongly against the passive, subjectivity to a prestructured substitute and illusory reality which is the normal situation for the audience of the commercial film. The language structures developed in this aspect of cinema have conditioned film makers' and audience expectancy, in such a way that even the 'realist' documentary, the politically and socially conscious film and much of the alternative cinema of the underground, operates in the same ethos of audience passivity. In this situation, there can be no credible relationship between the current presentation, the events which it purports to be 'about', and the method by which these events are selected and structured by the film's process. In other words, the techniques of film have been primarily developed to 'manipulate' a recorded (picture and sound) 'reality', into structures and events which never happened in anything like the terms which the language tells us they happened, whilst presenting the result as a 'representation' of reality. As a result of this, whatever the motivation,

Primacy of the Projection Event.

The direction of my thinking, and the tendencies in my films, keep returning me to an affirmation of the projection event as the primary reality. In other words, the Real TIME/SPACE event at projection, which is the current, tangible point of access for the audience, is to be considered as the experiential base through which any retrospective record, reference or process is to be dealt with by the audience. This reverses the situation common to the cinematic language where experience of the real TIME/SPACE at projection is subsumed by various aspects of manipulated retrospective 'reality'. My own awareness of this problem has developed gradually, and though other film makers' interpretations of their work may not correspond to mine (it is not important if they do not), I see a fairly clear historical direction.

The Camera and Shooting Event.

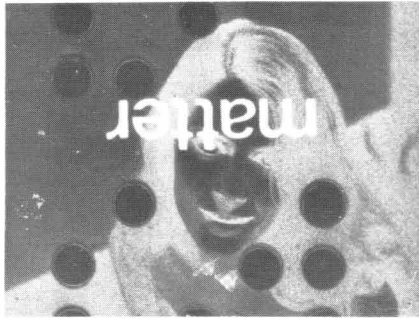
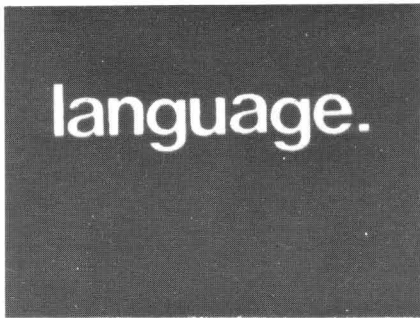
Perhaps beginning at the Cinema Verité movement there has been a tendency to seek (mostly only partially conscious) some form of TIME/SPACE equivalence between the events before the camera, and those presented to the audience. The greatest obstacle to forming some kind of interplay between the real TIME and real SPACE of the cinema-viewing situation, and the recorded or implied time of the film's action, has been the enormous discrepancy of scale between them. One and a half hours in a roughly rectangular cinema interior to be related to the portrayal of a life time in Russia. . . . They are so far apart in scale as to be unrelateable.

Andy Warhol was the first film maker to find an extreme enough base from which to deal with this problem. His work from 1963 to 1965 including *Sleep, Empire, Couch, Blow Job, Harlot* extended the realist tradition. The deliberate use of un-fakeable continuous takes, the inclusion of white flare at the end of reels, background noise and director's instructions on sound tracks, allows the series of recorded images to stand as a credible *equivalent* for the events before and in the camera - the processes and actual state of affairs at all stages are made fairly clear in a matter-of-fact way. However, Warhol seems to have abandoned the more fundamental implications of this earlier work in favour of a return to a narrative/documentary style, leaving its extension to others. Of these, the two who have explored the possibilities of 'equivalence' most thoroughly

if any of the methods of 'narrative' (manipulative) editing and shooting are used, even in relationship to 'news-reel', or documentary material, the result is inevitably suspect. Before any film can relate itself to events in retrospect of its presentation to an audience, with any credibility, it is necessary to develop language and techniques which can clarify, within the film's structure, the actual processes which are taking place.

The complexity of this problem defies any obvious solution in filmic terms, however, I am not the only film maker who has identified and reacted to it in some way.

shot of Malcolm Le Grice's **Horror Film 2**. 1972 three-dimensional shadow event 15 minutes



have been Peter Gidal (*Room, Focus, Takes, Bedroom*) and Larry Gotheim (*Fog Line, Barn Rushes*), all these works particularly Gidal's have a determination to work with a 'shallow' camera TIME/SPACE – shallow SPACE in that the camera is either static or its movements are limited and formal, the arena for filming (frequently a room interior) is directly relatable to the space in which the film is to be seen – shallow TIME in the basic use of continuous takes where the shooting time can stand as a direct equivalent for the projection time.

From the introduction of the notion of equivalence between the shooting (camera) and projection TIME/SPACE, the possibility of other forms of relateability must arise. The work of Michael Snow, beginning at *Wavelength* draws on Warhol's TIME/SPACE equivalence as a starting point, but this film and \Leftrightarrow (*Back and Forth*) develop more complex kinds of relationship. In both, some strict continuity allows the real TIME/SPACE of projection to become a 'concrete' experience in its own right. It is clear though, that neither film is shot in one take, or one camera 'set-up', but that in both the 'shooting' TIME/SPACE is shallow enough for the experience at projection to become an analogue or be used as a metaphor for it. A complication arises in that both films try to form a compatibility with a more conventional illusory, narrative TIME/SPACE, I think in a confusing and detrimental way, stretching the tenuous thread of relatability with the 'concrete' projection experience beyond its limits. This is unfortunate as a new kind of possibility emerges, particularly from \Leftrightarrow (*Back and Forth*), a product of the special camera procedure. This also involves illusion of a different kind, it is non-retrospective, a physical/psychological product of the 'concrete' experience. The repetitive movement of the camera side to side, as it speeds up, brings about a visual transformation of the portrayed and actual space experience, amongst other transformations seeming to widen the screen, so that the screen wall takes on the identity of the wall and windows before the camera, and the filmed room space flattens to the thinness of the screen or the photographic celluloid. Mattieijn Siep's film *Double*

Shutter, also explores this area of perceptual transformation of TIME/SPACE brought about by extreme processes of selection/sampling at the camera event (camera on a swing, with a secondary rotating shutter in front) continuing the development of a 'cubistic' film TIME/SPACE. Roger Hammond's new film, *Erlanger Program* also extends and makes clearer this 'relativistic' conception of the camera event, and the way in which construction of 'reality' is directly related to the methods and procedures of observation. However, his film raises so many inter-related questions and new thoughts that there is no value in any short cursory analysis. I will save myself that pleasure for another piece.

The Printer

In the earliest stages of film's history, the same piece of equipment was often used as camera, printer and projector. The similarities of functioning provide something of a 'mechanistic' basis for the 'equivalence' idea. Until recently, printing has been the area of retrospective TIME/SPACE (or content) which has involved me most. I have been interested by the way in which it allows physical aspects of the medium, the reality of the celluloid, emulsion, sprockets, the nature and capabilities of the machinery to become the basis of experience and content. Though I am not completely convinced that printing, being less 'retrospective' in the whole film process, gives it an advantage in relating to the projection event over involvement with the camera, but it does seem to help with the elimination of narrative, and psychological portrayal factors. This assists the gradual focusing down onto the nature and processes of film. Historically (certainly for myself), the relationship between the printer and projector has helped to develop awareness of the components of the projection event. (Although I now see some of the involvement in this area as an inhibition to a more thorough concern with the projection event itself.)

The earliest direct references to the film material as content (celluloid etc.) came around 1966 with George Landow's *Film In Which There Appear Sprocket Holes, Edge Lettering, Dust Particles, Etc.* It started its life as a loop film performed by Landow (live projection situation!), as did my own

Little Dog for Roger (two screen loop film 1967). This film was printed by me on a converted, old projector, printing 9.5 mm direct onto 16 mm. It caused so many difficulties in the printer/projector, that the resultant film referred very strongly to the various aspects of celluloid, sprockets, scratches, and projection. The projection slip, printed on the film still causes projectionists to stop the film to correct the fault. The other film which most contributed to a developing awareness of these areas was *Roh Film* 1968 (*Raw Film*), by Birgit and Wilhelm Hein. Again the production was closely linked to projection activity, being re-filmed from the screen, pushing all kinds of pasted up 8 mm and 16 mm material through a very accommodating Siemens projector. These films were produced unaware of the others, and though all very different from each other (I still have never seen Landow's film, but reports indicate many differences), their independent emergence supports the idea of some coherent, more than idiosyncratic direction. Recently the possibilities of the printer, and material aspects of film as content, have become the basis for a wide variety of work. It is premature to define 'movements' in this area. It is complicated by a number of factors, the first of which is that so many possibilities have been opened up in a previously neglected area that it is difficult to see which are fundamental and which are peripheral. The second is, that though the 'tactile' direction of the first three films has been extended in films like *Green Cut Gate*, and *Maja Replicate* by Fred Drummond, and *Slides* by Annabel Nicolson, other areas have emerged exploring time based structuring, permutation of loops or other mathematical ideas, films like *Film No. 1* by David Crosswaite, *St. Pauls* and *Clock Time* by Stuart Pound, my own *Reign of the Vampire*, and *Love Story 2*, and *Shepherd's Bush* by Mike Leggett. The last two films in particular show some of the difficulties of classification, being strongly concerned with 'duration' in the projection event. Though both the films are dependent on structuring at the printer, this aspect is given some kind of 'neutrality', so that the current Time experiences at the projection can be dominant. For myself the concept of 'duration' as a concrete (quasi-sculptural) dimension has recurred being included in the titles of three of my films, *Blind White Duration*, *Blue Field Duration*, *Whitchurch Down (Duration)*, and is a notion which seems to play a significant part in the Michael Snow films, particularly *One Second in Montreal*. Another direction has emerged out of concern with film copying procedures, which creates many new ideas of 'content', and uses highly 'retrospective' material, and does so in a way which completely declares the process, treating existing film as raw material for trans-

formation. Though I was vaguely aware of this direction in *Little Dog for Roger*, Ken Jacob's *Tom Tom The Pipers Son* (1969) is a clear and deliberate exploration of the transformation and methods of transformation of a small piece of very early silent film. My own films *Berlin Horse* (1970), and *1919* (1971) have similar concerns, *1919*, taking a short piece of Russian newsreel from the date of the title, attempts, through printing transformations, to build an insight into the changing function of a piece of film as it relates differently to the world throughout its history.

Much of the work that has been described has a degree of conscious awareness of the real TIME/SPACE of the projection event, is aware of some of the factors of audience behaviour in assimilating or structuring the film's information, and is influenced by this awareness at some level in the film's construction. However, there is yet another important direction which has emerged, which depends almost entirely on the physical events in the projection situation for its 'content'. This is the direction opened up around the notion of 'flicker'. Though *Arnulf Rainer* (1957) by Peter Kubelka is clearly the first film to use alternating completely white and black frames, and is an exceptional and prophetic film, it has a musical, compositional structure which inhibits developing 'content' out of the fundamental perceptual and conceptual mechanisms of the audience. *The Flicker* (1966) by Beverly and Tony Conrad on the other hand, using the same black and white frame limitation, works almost completely with the 'autonomic' nervous system as the basis. The film develops higher order perceptual (rhythm 'gestalts') and conceptual structures but is careful to maintain a 'neutrality' in the film's internal structuring, so that the viewer can be more concerned with his own transformation of awareness, than with discovering the film makers' structural intentions. The viewer's own behaviour is his content. *The Flicker* has opened up the possible, more precise, understanding of human response to different orders of periodicity in the visual field, from events of very short duration 1/24th of a second, to controllably long durations, and various stages between. Also in 1966, Paul Sharits, with *Ray Gun Virus* began to explore a similar region, using colour frames. Though his work has never had the 'neutrality' and strict limitation of *The Flicker*, the viewer is frequently able to adopt a similar role in relationship to his own responses. Between 1966 and 68 he made a number of statements which show that he was concerned with the development of a new concept of cinema, with its base in the sensory and conceptual mechanisms of the audience, and the physical realities of the material and equip-

ment of film production and projection. His most recent films, *S:TREAM:S:ECTION:S:S:ECTIONED*, and *Inferential Current*, show a concern with the celluloid, scratches etc., an area of involvement already described, but there is another direction which he has frequently (at least since 1969 or 70) expressed a desire to explore; the conception of film as the basis of an 'on-going' gallery installation, and which he recently was able to realize in one work. This direction brings up some questions and ideas which are crucial to my own work, but because of the developments I have been describing and recent work by other film makers, I consider many of them to be more generally valid. Increasing awareness of the projection event as a primary reality has led to concern in five inter-related areas of exploration.

1. The relationship of the audience to retrospective filmic reality.
2. The nature of the medium: Materials, Equipment, Processes.
3. The nature of behaviour and experience

opposite :

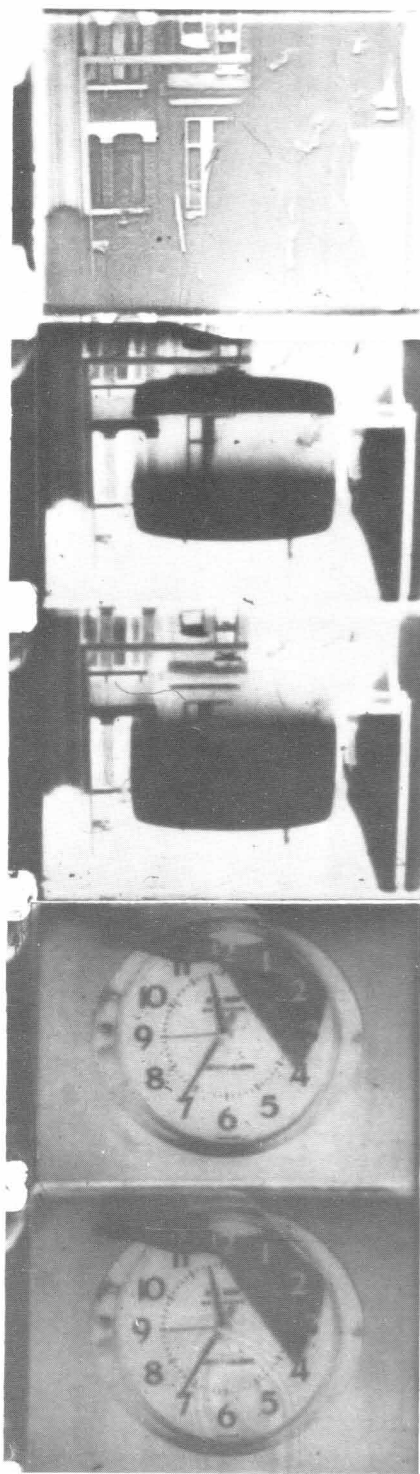
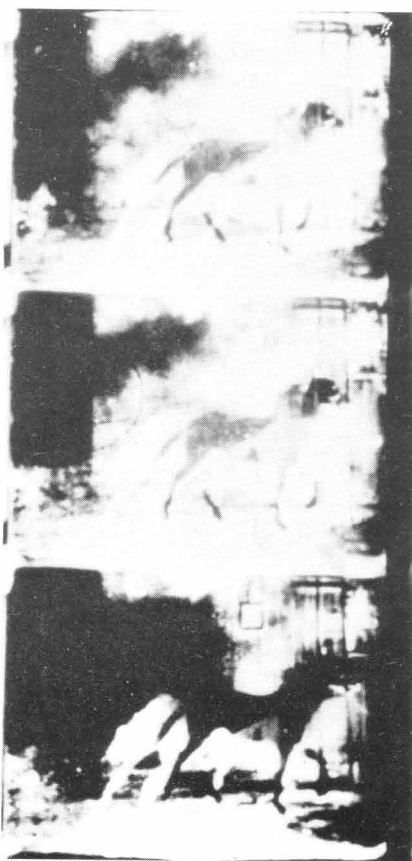
Peter Gidal Upside Down Feature
1967-72

right :

Stuart Pound's Clock Time, 1972

below :

Malcolm Le Grice's Berlin Horse, 1970

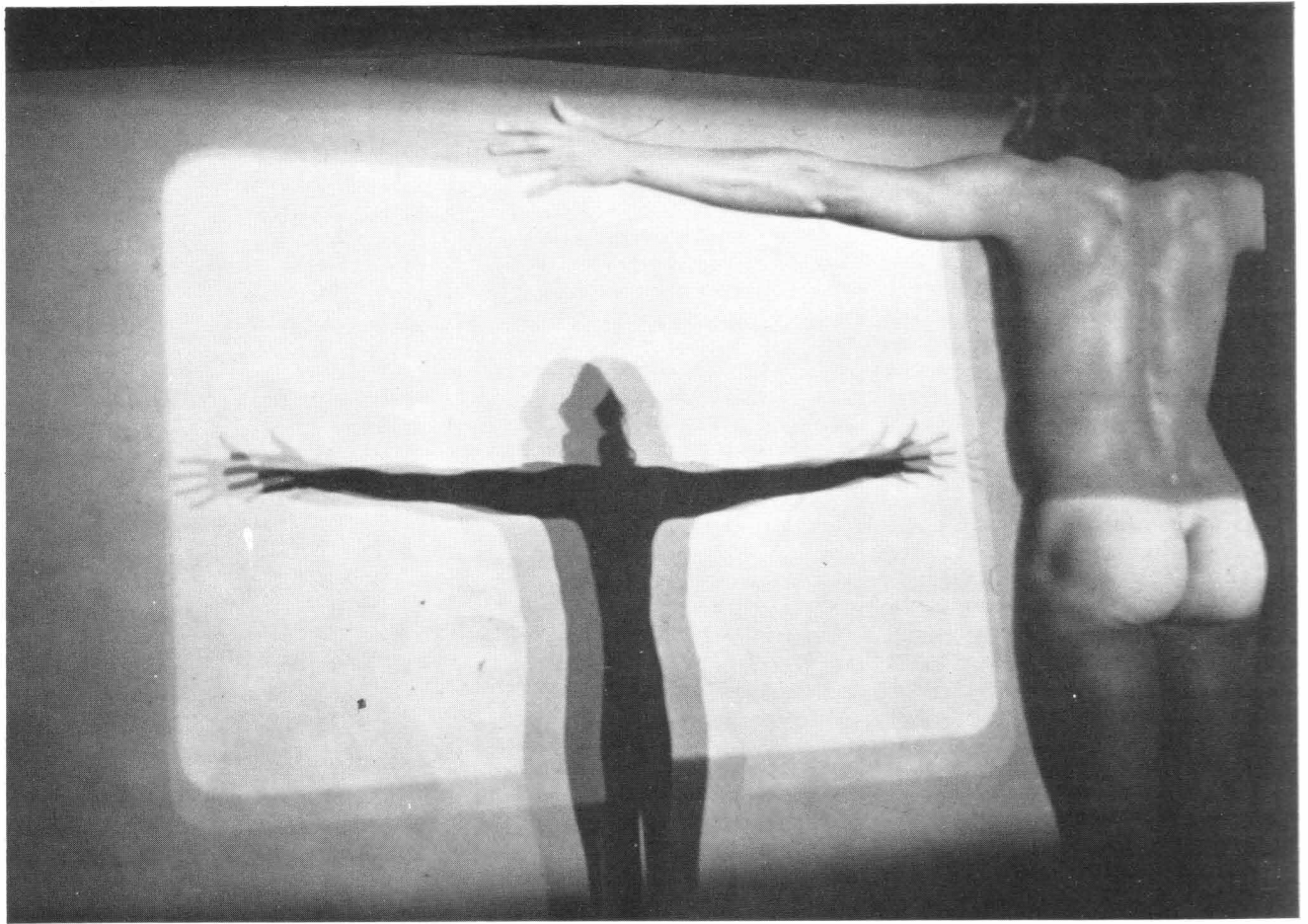


available to the audience in relationship to a current 'concrete' reality.

4. Time or duration as a 'concrete' dimension.

5. Notions of the spatial or TIME/SPACE structuring of the projection event.

I have discussed the first two areas, and touched on an aspect of the third and fourth but work in those areas and the last is at a formative and uncertain stage. Although exploration of perception and duration can be continued in the present projection format and context, my own



feeling is that significant further development is being inhibited by the physical structure (and cultural conditions) of the projection situation, even within the more flexible 'underground' context.

My own recent work has drawn me into an overriding concern with the projection event itself, and an increasing desire to limit retrospective input to that situation, or at least to have it clearly subservient to the current reality. By considering the nature of the film event at projection in more general terms a wide range of new possibilities of filmic structure and audience relationship emerge. In addition I feel that many existing films could be seen and understood better in the audience and projection relationship could be re-specified. I have always encountered difficulties in presenting my double projection work, but it has just been possible to contain it within most cinema formats. However, my most recent work including live shadow action and spatial distribution of projectors is usually impossible, or forced into a compromise form. I see film as the basic component of a TIME/SPACE event structure, where time can be thought of as a dimension almost in a sculptural sense, and the distribution of projectors and sound sources can be specified as part of the work. In this situation, projection serves film, rather than acting as an unconscious determinant of it. As well as my own recent film pieces, other film makers have either produced work or have presented ideas, needing a new cinematic format.

Tony and Beverley Conrad recently showed in London (under very inadequate conditions) two works for spatially distributed projection. *Four Square* is a film designed for four screens surrounding the audience. Through its spatial distribution of abstract image and sound it begins to build up a TIME/SPACE experience where the mental construction of the events do not clearly differentiate between separation/distribution in time from separation/distribution in space. A unified field TIME/SPACE experience. Their second (untitled) piece using four loops of identical and very simple slightly oscillating vertical stripes, was projected for one and a half hours, with gradual changes in the projection format. This always allowed the audience time to experience internal/subjective perceptual transformations to basically simple and stable external phenomena. The recent Paul Sharits installation also

involved four projectors, where the images were rotated through 90° (into a tall narrow screen format), projected side by side. The film was printed to incorporate sprockets, frame lines and sound track within the image, the total result of the projection being like a shimmering section of film viewed from the side. His expressed intention for this format is 'largely in terms of creating a situation where the audience can enter or leave the work at any time, viewing from any angle.'

In my own shadow pieces, though the inclusion of people performing some action introduces a theatrical and imagist aspect, my main concern is still formal, and has a strong sympathy with the Conrad work. I have four shadow pieces, but *Love Story 1* has only been performed once, was exploratory and improvised, the most successful elements being incorporated into *Horror Film 1*. This piece has very simple components, a sound loop tape of breathing, two movie projectors with loops of pure colours fading in and out of each other and a larger frame slide projector, with one fixed colour. All are superimposed on each other with the projectors aimed from different angles. The superimpositions create a continually changing colour light mix. I interrupt the beam with a series of formal actions creating a complex set of coloured shadows. The final section involves focusing a pair of skeleton hands onto the screen in relationship to my own hands. The intention with this, as with my other shadow pieces, is to build a complex visual experience out of simple and readily available aspects of the projection situation. *Horror Film 2* uses a back projection screen with a variety of projection sources, including a red and green source close together. The space and action behind. The screen is revealed piece by piece by the shadows from discrete light sources (search light eyes, an analog for the camera), the information which is given is continually contradicted by further information from different light sources, including the red and green Stereoscopic source (the piece is viewed with red and green glasses). It is an illusionistic piece; in much the same way that the tricks of a magician are illusionistic, all the components for the illusion are concretely available. It explores some of the primitive mechanisms for dealing with information from sometimes contradictory traces, but which none the less are known to be being produced out of an 'actuality' in current real TIME/SPACE. *Love Story 3* is also a simple piece in its components. A person walks backwards and forwards across two white screens casting a shadow, later his actual shadow is joined by pre-filmed shadows performing the same actions. Gradually the actions within the film deviate from what is directly possible for the shadow cast by the person in real

TIME/SPACE, but the two 'realities' are kept closely relatable as references to each other. Similar to the problem of illusion touched on in reference to Snow, there is an important difference when the determinants for illusion or TIME/SPACE manipulation are concretely available, and when they are hidden. In my 3D shadow piece some of the anomalies of perception and illusion would have no structural significance (or tension) if the same effects had been pre-printed onto film, with all the manipulation tricks which are possible in this. Their significance lies in their being in a concrete referential situation, the product of a current reality.

Sally Potter's double projection film and live event, *The Building* explored (earlier than *Love Story 3*) some possibilities of the comparison between pre-filmed action and their current live reconstruction, but her film work, recently including dance extends much more towards theatre than my own. Film inserts have been 'used' in the theatre situation from time to time, particularly since the 'Multi-Media' direction, however, Sally Potter's work integrates the film and theatrical action in a way which does not relegate the film to the role of moving backdrop, and extends the formal possibilities of film and theatre. The work of David Dye, represents another direction, mostly based on the physical manipulation of 8 mm projectors in some near one-to-one equivalence to the camera handling which gave rise to the film in the projector. Small differences in the nature of the two events become significant content in the 'idea' space between the image and the projector handling. Some of the 'semantic' aspects of Dye's work are similar to earlier film and live action pieces by Peter Wiebel and Valie Export, isolating specific discrepancies between the nature of film and 'reality'.

Recent work by David Crosswaite, Birgit and Wilhelm Hein, Mike Leggett, Annabel Nicolson and Tony Hill has all stretched the conventional projection situation to its limits and beyond.

We have now reached a situation where it is necessary for projection events to be defined and specified at a more general level, controlling the component elements, their space and time distribution, and audience relationship as an integral aspect of the film structure.

The biggest problem to be dealt with is creating a physical 'venue' for this kind of work. The most suitable existing possibility must lie in performance or installation in the art gallery situation, and this requires the back up of a pool of suitable equipment which can be transported, with performance or installation for longer than a one-night stand. Meanwhile the work will continue to develop and be seen under inadequate conditions.

two shots of Malcolm Le Grice's *Horror Film 1* 1972 (film and slide projections with live performance)